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AUTHOR Nelson-Herber, Joan
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ABSTRACT

The staff development program for the Network of Secondary School Demonstration Centers for Teaching Reading in the Content Areas is a long-range, highly structured, and comprehensive model. In addition to the support system for the learning and implementation of strategies for teaching reading in the content areas, the program employs presentation of theory or strategy, modeling, practice, feedback, and coaching. The key issues considered in developing this program were the instructional goals, the organizational structure of the school, the resources available, and the nature of the innovation to be implemented. In addition, it was considered essential that the program (1) be sensitive to the perceived and expressed needs of school personnel, (2) be based on defined long range goals and objectives, (3) be grounded in a theoretical framework and presented through a consistent information source, (4) be designed to take advantage of a multiplier effect, (5) be supported with sufficient resources, and (6) be evaluated on the basis of levels of use. (JD)

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A Network of Secondary School
Demonstration Centers
for Teaching Reading in Content Areas

Network Report # 2

A STAFF DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR TEACHING READING IN CONTENT AREAS

Joan Nelson-Herber

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DIRECTORS

Harold L. Herber
Reading and Language Arts Ctr.
Syracuse University
150 Marshall Street
Syracuse, NY 13210

Joan Nelson-Herber
Division of Education
State University of
New York at Binghamton
Binghamton, NY 13901

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A STAFF DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR TEACHING READING IN CONTENT AREAS

Joan Nelson-Herber

Almost every professional textbook that supports teaching reading in content areas indicates that a cohesive instructional model is necessary to provide content area teachers with a repertoire of teaching strategies for teaching reading simultaneously with their subject matter. However, it is the staff development program, which supports teachers in their study and implementation of the instructional model, that seems to make the difference between success and failure for a content area reading program.

This report presents the elements of a successful staff development model implemented in the Network of Secondary School Demonstration Centers for Teaching Reading in Content Areas. The Network is the result of a cooperative effort among two universities (Syracuse University and SUNY-Binghamton) and four school districts (Bronx, NY, District 11;

Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC; Jefferson-Lewis BOCES, Watertown, NY; and Johnson City, NY), and was originally funded by the National Basic Skills Improvement Program.

The terms in-service education and staff development are often used interchangeably, but the following definitions are proposed to provide a useful distinction for both program development and program evaluation:

> In-service Education addresses the varied needs of individual teachers or groups of teachers for help in expanding and refining their present repertoires of teaching behaviors. For example, programs may be set up to respond to teacher requests for assistance, to present speakers on current topics of interest, to provide demonstration of new methods or materials, and/or to present workshops on specific techniques and strategies for the improvement of teaching. These in-service sessions may or may not be effective, depending on the structure and processes used, but they almost invariably focus on changes in teacher behavior toward the improvement of instruction.
>
> Staff Development addresses long range changes in the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of admini-

strators, supervisors, and teachers in a whole school or school system. It involves the mastery of new models, new approaches, and new or alternative curriculums, and the development of long range organizational support systems for the personnel involved. To develop new repertoires of thinking, organizing, and behaving, the program must focus on the achievement of school-wide goals and must involve all relevant school personnel.

The key question to be asked when considering a program for instructional improvement is "Do you want to swat mosquitoes or do you want to drain the swamp?". In educational terms, the question reads, "Do you want a program that helps individual teachers to refine and expand their present repertoires of teaching behaviors or do you want a program that addresses school-wide adoption of a comprehensive model of change toward the improvement of instruction?". No value judgment is implied here. Both types of programs are necessary to meet the varying needs of schools and school personnel. What must be considered in answering the question are the instructional goals of the program, the organizational structure of the school, the resources available, and the nature of the innovation to be implemented.

School personnel in each of the districts that became part of the Network recognized that their students were experiencing difficulty in reading their subject area text books. They also recognized that corrective and remedial reading classes, while effective for a few students, were not the answer to the problems of the majority of students. These students did not need a recycling of basic reading skills, Instead, they needed instruction in the higher level analytical, critical and creative reading-reasoning processes required for comprehension of the increasingly difficult materials of the content areas. All of their students needed the benefit of reading instruction in every classroom where reading was needed in order to be successful. Finally, they recognized that such a goal would require a comprehensive staff development program for administrators, supervisors and teachers to implement an instructional model for teaching reading in content areas and to provide the organizational support system for that implementation.

Joyce and Showers (1980), in a review of research related to in-service and staff development programs, identified the following components of training:

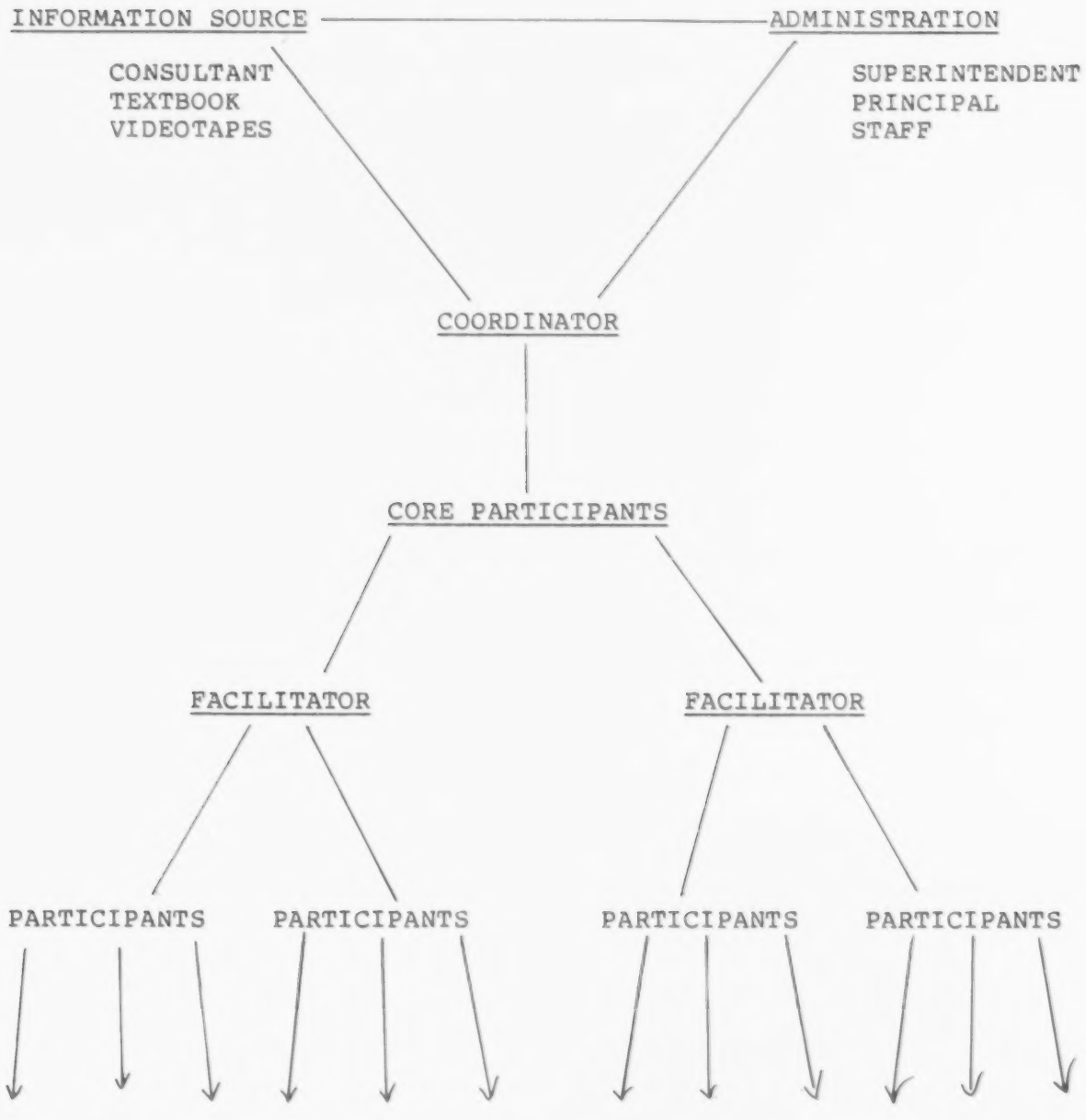
1. Presentation of theory or description of skill or strategy;

2. Modeling or demonstration of skills or models of teaching;
3. Practice in simulated or classroom settings;
4. Structured and open ended feedback (provision of information about performance);
5. Coaching for application (hands-on, in-classroom assistance with the transfer of skills and strategies to the classroom).

The research evidence suggests that when these components are combined in a comprehensive training sequence, each has much greater power than when each is used alone.

The staff development program for the Network is a long range, highly structured, comprehensive model that employs all of the training components described by Joyce and Showers as well as other components that provide the support system for the learning and implementation of strategies for teaching reading in content areas. The figure on page 6 provides a visual model of the support system of the program. To establish such a program, certain conditions must be coordinated to form a cohesive system for instructional improvement.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT MODEL



Conditions

A review of the research on in-service/staff development programs indicates that there are certain conditions -- conditions that are not common in most in-service settings -- that are required for successful staff development:

1. The staff development program must be addressed to the perceived and expressed needs of school personnel.

For a staff development program to be effective, school personnel must perceive the need for it. A needs assessment may indicate that there is a problem, but does not necessarily identify the appropriate response to the problem. The same expressed needs may lead to different responses, depending on the knowledge and sophistication of the perceiver. Content area teachers generally do not study reading instruction in their preservice education and therefore may not recognize that students' problems with content area reading assignments are not necessarily related to basic reading skills problems (Nelson, 1980). For example, it's not unusual to find content teachers saying things like: "My kids can't read the textbook;" or "My students lack basic reading skills;" or "Half my students

would benefit from remedial reading." This kind of thinking may lock a school into a deficit recycling model of reading instruction wherein many students are retaught the identical reading skills that they were taught in elementary reading programs, leading to little or no transfer effect in content area classes. An educative process is often necessary to help school personnel to recognize the kinds of difficulties students encounter in the transfer from learning to read to reading to learn, and to understand the support that is necessary to help students make the transition (Herber, 1970, 1978; Vacca, 1980).

Several of the Network school systems began their staff development programs on the basis of needs assessments that suggested the need for remedial reading programs. Fortunately, the administrative personnel and/or the secondary school reading specialists in these systems were familiar with the research and literature on content area reading instruction and were able to help content teachers to recognize and appreciate the necessity for support of reading processes within the content area classroom. An evaluation committee was formed representing the various constituents, i.e. teachers, administration, staff and community, and, after presentations by several consultants in the field, they selected a model and committed to a long range staff development program for teaching reading in content areas.

2. The staff development program must be based on defined long range goals and objectives.

Depending on its size and organization, a school system must be willing to commit to a long range plan for school improvement. Teachers need time to assimilate new ideas, to learn new instructional strategies, to practice new strategies in simulated and realistic settings, to integrate the new behaviors into their own teaching repertoires, to help their students adapt to and become comfortable with the new approaches, and, finally, to fine-tune and consolidate for teaching confidence. Further, teachers need the support and commitment of the school administrative and supervisory personnel to do it!

According to Samuels:

> Current research suggests that significant innovation requires two years of planning and incubation time, two years for implementation, and two years to produce a stable effect on student achievement. Those projects which were unsuccessful rushed forward too soon and often failed to create the necessary climate for district support and commitment (1981, p. 271).

The specific goals of the Network staff development program are defined in the information sources used in the program. Time

frames vary according to the size of the school or district involved in the staff development program, but goals and expectations of achievement should be defined realistically in terms of implementation levels over time. When teachers recognize that the staff development program represents a long range school district priority that is reflected in the reward system, they are more willing to invest the time, effort, and emotional energy that is required for implementation of change and improvement of instruction.

When this condition is not met, -- when the staff development program is seen as "a quick fix" or "here today and gone tomorrow" -- it is likely to be ineffective or to be implemented symbolically without significant change in instructional practice or in student achievement.

3. <u>The staff development program must be grounded in a theoretical framework and presented through a consistent information source.</u>

There are currently more than 25 different text books that purport to deal with the concept of teaching reading in content areas. Some have a theoretical base and some do not. Some emphasize teaching reading simultaneously with course content; some emphasize a skills oriented deficit-recycling approach; and some a study skills approach. Given this variety of approaches,

it is vital that program planning personnel decide what the IT is that they want to develop. Different theoretical bases support different goals and objectives. Lack of clarity regarding the goals of the program can lead to confusion and discouragement on the part of participants.

Whatever model of content area reading instruction is selected, consistent information sources are critically important to the success of a staff development program. Teachers need to understand the relationship between the strategies they are learning to use and the theoretical rationale and research that supports their use. They need to understand that there are a limited number of strategies that, once learned and refined, can be used in limitless ways to support their students' reading progress. They need to be able to work with other teachers using the same strategies to share ideas and experiences for the improvement of instruction and instructional materials.

Further, consistent information sources are crucial to the multiplier model described later in this report. A potential problem in using the multiplier principle is the loss or degradation of information across generations leading to drastic mutation of strategies. If each generation teaches the next only what is remembered from the last, much is lost in translation. It is vitally important that the same set of information sources be available for consistent use with each successive generation

of participants. When each generation uses the same information sources, all participating teachers develop the same basic understanding of the program and its constituent parts. This commonality of knowledge allows content area teachers to work together to refine their understandings, to provide feedback on materials development, to coach each other in the use of the instructional strategies, and to develop an esprit de corps in knowing that they are working together for instructional improvement.

The program for the Network emphasizes a model for teaching reading in content areas presented in a text by Herber (1970, 1978) and in a videotaped staff development program by Herber and Nelson (1977). This approach emphasizes the simultaneous teaching of content and process. It presents strategies for teachers to use to prepare students for their reading assignments, to guide students in their reading, and to promote independence in reading beyond the assigned material.

4. <u>The staff development program should be designed to take advantage of a multiplier effect.</u>

The diagram on page 6 showing the support system for the Network staff development program, also illustrates the multiplier effect.

Given the appropriate information sources, the services of a knowledgeable consultant, and administrative support, the reading staff development coordinator teaches the content area reading model to a core group of volunteer participants. The training of the core group includes presentation of the theoretical bases and instructional strategies of the model, demonstration and simulation of instructional strategies, practice of the strategies in simulated and real settings, and refinement in the use of the strategies through feedback and classroom coaching. Some of these core participants may then become facilitators for other groups of volunteer participants, creating the multiplier effect. In larger districts, some of the original volunteers may eventually serve as coordinators, working with several facilitators, who, in turn, work with one or more groups of participants in the study and appliation of strategies and materials. The coordinators and facilitators also conduct refinement sessions for participants who have completed the initial study of strategies and materials, to deepen their understanding and refine their application. Thus, through the multiplier principle, the staff development program can eventually affect the entire staff of secondary schools in a district.

Volunteerism of participants is important, because it is the best teachers in a district who are most likely to volunteer for a program that appears to meet the needs of their students. These

teachers have enough teaching experience to have developed their own instructional styles, and sufficient comfort with their styles to consider theory-based alternatives as an approach to curriculum transformation and instructional improvement. This builds a success factor into the early stages of the program. Competent teachers who study the teaching of reading in their content areas will be able to do it well and will feel good about what it helps them to accomplish. These volunteers become the focus of the program's public relations effort. Because they are generally the district's strongest teachers, they experience considerable success in applying the instructional strategies and materials in their own classes. Because they are respected as highly competent and accomplished professionals, their enthusiasm for what they are learning, and their success in its application significantly impact on their colleagues. By their own success, they persuade other professional colleagues to become part of the program.

4. <u>The staff development program must be supported with sufficient resources.</u>

To be effective, the program must have long term commitment from the school board, the superintendent, the principal, and the entire staff of support personnel.

The superintendent is the key to implementation and sustained support of the program. If the superintendent believes in the program and supports it as a priority, the staff will recognize that priority and reflect it. The superintendent's primary role in the program is to provide the means by which the program can be established: time for teachers to study strategies and prepare materials; space for teachers to study and discuss instructional strategies, curricular improvements, and program progress and problems; clerical support for creation of new instructional lessons and units; and a supportive environment that recognizes teachers' efforts as part of a reward system. The superintendent must also help the school board and community to understand and support the commitment to professional renewal of teachers and the value of the program for both teachers and students.

Principals are in a position to provide instructional leadership for the program. This leadership can be manifested in a variety of ways. Principals study the instructional strategies and curriculum materials that teachers are expected to apply, and they develop an understanding of the rationale for use of those strategies and materials. They support the application of teaching reading in content areas and facilitate opportunities for teachers to meet together for cooperative study of the strategies, materials and rationale of the program and for practice on what they are learning. They encourage teachers to participate in the program. They encourage experienced teachers to provide

demonstration lessons and coaching for less experienced teachers. They recognize that teachers may lose efficiency when they engage in the study of new teaching practices, and they support teachers during periods of temporary awkwardness that result from this study and change of practice. Finally, they recognize that until teachers develop understanding of the new strategies and confidence in their application over an extended period, the program will not fully impact on student achievement. Thus, they resist premature evaluation of student achievement related to the program.

A more complete description of the roles of the various actors in the staff development program will be addressed in a later Network Report. Role descriptions include those of administrator, consultant, principal, coordinator, facilitator, and participant.

5. <u>The staff development program should be evaluated on the basis of levels of use.</u>

When a staff development program is implemented using a multiplier effect over an extended period of time, it stands to reason that different teachers will be operating at different stages of development in their understanding of the rationale for the program, in their knowledge and use of the strategies, in their development of materials, in their attitudes toward the program

and its constituents, and in their confidence in demonstrating the strategies and materials for others in the program. Periodic evaluation of the program, then, should be based on expectations of levels of use by particular teachers at different points in their development.

Structured interview techniques and classroom observation scales may be used to assess teachers' progress in the program. The notion of levels of use was proposed and developed by Hall, Loucks, Rutherford, and Newlove (1975). The Levels of Use (LoU) interviews provide descriptions of teacher behaviors as they mature in the use of an innovation. The descriptions are detailed enough so that teachers may be described and categorized as working at a particular level of use in a continuum from nonuse, to orientation, to preparation, to mechanical use, to routine use, to refinement, to integration, and finally to renewal. Another technique that may be used to assess maturation of teachers in a staff development program is the use of Stages of Concern (SoC), a written questionnaire that measures the concerns of teachers as related to typical teachers involved in a change process (Hall, George, and Rutherford, 1979). The stages of concern vary from awareness, to informational concerns, to personal concerns, to management concerns, to consequence concerns, to collaboration concerns, to refocussing concerns.

The LoU interviews were used in a content area reading program developed by Herber and Nelson (the directors of the Network) for the Dallas Independent School District before the Network was developed. The interviews were found by school district evaluators to yield a very satisfactory evaluation of the staff development component of the program (Okpalobi, 1978).

The use of these assessment instruments coupled with classroom observation and examination of lesson and unit material developed by the teachers can yield a fairly comprehensive staff development program evaluation. A profile may even be developed of teachers operating at different stages of the staff development program in a particular school district and used as a set of local norms.

Much has been written about using increases in student achievement scores as the basis for evaluation of staff development programs. We believe that student achievement scores may be used as <u>one</u> of the measures of the worth of a total program of instructional improvement in summative evaluation. Unfortunately, most programs that attempt to use student achievement scores for evaluation do so prematurely. As indicated earlier, until teachers learn the new strategies, practice them, apply them in the classroom, develop and refine curriculum materials to support the new strategies, and develop confidence in using them, it makes no sense to expect changes in student performance. Even

then, when we ascribe student outcomes to teacher behaviors and strategies, we operate more on faith than on empirical evidence. Brinkerhoff (1980) states the case clearly:

> All measures of pupil variables are more or less imperfect and the unreliability inherent in these measures is magnified considerably when change scores are calculated.... The current - and likely the near future - state of the art of educational research methods, combined with the realities of the public school environment, make it both theoretically and practically unsound to pursue child-change measures as an index of in-service program effectiveness (p. 37).

It seems to us enough that teachers understand the instructional model, learn the research-based strategies, apply them in the classroom, give evidence of progression in levels of use and stages of concern, gain confidence in their teaching, maintain a positive enthusiastic attitude toward teaching, and manifest professional pride in their accomplishments. If the staff development program results in all these changes, it is well worth the effort. If, in addition, student attitudes and achievement scores improve over the life of the program (3-6 years) the program is worthy of replication and dissemination.

Let's return to the question -- "Do you want to swat mosquitos or drain the swamp?" If you believe that all students should have the benefit of reading instruction to learn to read to learn, if you believe that reading should be taught in every classroom in which reading is needed to be successful, and if you believe that content area teachers should teach reading simultaneously with the content of their subject matter, then a staff development program for teaching reading in content areas should be a part of your comprehensive plan for instructional improvement.

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